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Richard Roberts.

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MEMOIR
OF
RICHARD ROBERTS JONES,
OF
ABERDARON,
IN THE COUNTY OF CARNARVON,
IN NORTH WALES;
EXHIBITING
A REMARKABLE INSTANCE
OF A PARTIAL POWER AND CULTIVATION
OF INTELLECT.

Povera e nuda va Filosofia.

PETR.

London :

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MEMOIR

OF

RICHARD ROBERTS JONES.

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THE superiority which one man obtains over another in the different departments of science or of taste, is generally attributed to the influence of genius, to the influence of some diviner inspiration, which can neither be communicated by instruction, nor attained by industry. We speak of the genius of Raphael, of Milton, of Newton, or of Bacon, and even of the genius which a man evinces in any particular profession : we suppose that he cannot fail of success, that he can reach an excellence which it is in vain for others to attempt.

Metaphysicians and philosophers come after, and labour to explain more distinctly, what is described in this general manner by mankind ; they endeavour to analyse what can really be meant by

this general term of genius; they consider, and they try to explain, the mode in which a pre-eminence so striking has been obtained.

By some it is maintained, that in all such instances we have only a more than usual quantity or power of intellect, directed by particular circumstances to some particular object; a greater capacity, which may be monopolized by some one study or pursuit, but that this capacity would have been equally successful and distinguished to whatever point it had happened originally to be directed; that Newton, in short, would have been as great a poet as he was a mathematician, if chance, or circumstances, or his early associations, had so influenced the extraordinary powers of his mind.

Such seems to have been the opinion of Dr. Johnson, and the language of Sir Joshua Reynolds is much of the same nature. By others it may be thought, that of the different faculties found in the human mind, some may be given in greater perfection than others, and more allied to excellence in particular pursuits: that in one man, for instance, the imagination may be particularly powerful, and we have then a poet; in another, the reasoning faculty, and we have then a philosopher, or mathematician.

Speculations of this kind are in themselves very curious, nor can they be thought destitute of instruction; since it must always be considered of great importance to know, what are the sources of human excellence in the different departments of intellectual exertion, and even of still more importance to know, what are the springs and circumstances upon which the formation of human character depends.

The following pages will, it is presumed, present some facts which may tend to throw light on this very interesting but difficult subject, and may perhaps furnish some few additional materials for the reflection of those who are interested in the science of the human mind; who are endeavouring to teach us what we are, and to what influences we are subjected by the ordinance of our Creator.

AMONG the singular characters which nature occasionally produces, and which display a diversity from the generality of mankind, may be ranked the person whose humble Memoir forms the subject of the following pages.

His father, Robert Jones, resided at Aberdaron, a little seaport on the wildest part of the coast

of Wales. He was by trade a carpenter; but, availing himself of his situation, he sometimes employed himself in fishing, and at other times made a voyage in a small boat from Aberdaron to Liverpool. By his wife, Margaret Richards, he had three sons and a daughter; of which sons, Richard, the object of our present inquiry, was the second. He was born in the year 1780. Deriving his christian name from the maiden name of his mother, and his surname from the christian name of his father, he was called Richard Roberts, by which name he was known till of late years, when he assumed also the surname of his father, and now calls himself Richard Roberts Jones.

Although his constitutional defects, and particularly the weakness of his eye-sight, disqualified him in some degree from bodily labour, the circumstances of his parents did not permit him to be idle, and accordingly his father attempted to bring him up to his own business. In the expectation he had formed of assistance from this quarter, he was however disappointed. From some cause not easy to be accounted for, Richard imbibed a taste for the acquisition of languages, the faculty of which he possessed in an extraordinary degree. Whether this faculty was the spontaneous

gift of nature, or the effect of accident or choice, is a question the correct answer to which would clear up greater difficulties than it at first sight seems to involve; but certain it is, that although he has exhibited abilities in this department which, under more favorable circumstances, might have enabled him to rival a Buxtorf or a Lipsius, he displays a most remarkable want of capacity on every other subject, and an almost entire privation of that discretion, which could alone enable him to turn his extraordinary acquirements to any useful purpose, or even to provide for his own support.

It was not until Richard was about nine years of age that he was enabled to read the Bible in his native language, in which he was instructed by his mother and his younger brother. He then attempted to acquire the English, but found it very difficult; for which he has since assigned as a reason, that the orthography is not well established, and that the pronunciation changes every ten years. In fact, his proficiency in it is not so great as in some other languages, to which he has paid a more decided attention.

At the age of fifteen, Richard began to study the Latin, by the assistance of a boy in the parish

school of Aberdaron, named John Evans. Although he never had the opportunity of attending the school with other children, he frequently contrived to get into it when the other boys had left it, and from the use of the books he found there, is said, by a person who knew him at the time, to have learnt more in one month than any other boy could learn in six. About the same time he acquired a method of writing, which, although evidently self-taught, is peculiarly legible, and which he applies with equal facility to any language with which he is acquainted.

When he was about nineteen years of age, he purchased from Evan Richards, a Welsh poet, a Greek grammar ; by the assiduous study of which, he obtained as much knowledge as enabled him to read a little of the language. This he has since improved to a considerable extent, and has read some of the Greek writers, particularly the poets, in their native tongue, together with their commentators. In this exercise his chief pleasure is derived, not from the facts related, or the information contained in the work, but from the form and construction of the language ; insomuch, that although he has made an addition to his grammatical knowledge, he seems to be nearly as ignorant

of the contents as he was before he began the perusal of the work which he has been reading.

In the following year, Richard happened to meet with an epitome of Buxtorf's Hebrew Grammar, which gave him the first idea of studying that language. Of the ardour with which he engaged in this pursuit, some idea may be formed by the following singular anecdote, which is related in his own hand-writing: "If it had not been the reverse of fortune, I would study a little of Hebrew music. A short time before I commenced to study Hebrew, I dreamed; and saw in my dream Johan. Buxtorfius singing Hebrew psalms to the harp; viz. as he sang psalms, he played the harp with his hands, and sang with his voice. He stood upon a mound opposite to my father's house."

On being asked by a friend, how he could have known the language in which Buxtorf sang, if he had not then commenced the study of Hebrew? he replied, that he knew very little of Hebrew when the dream occurred to him; that he sung the twelfth chapter of the Psalms, the whole of which Richard repeated by memory; that the person who appeared to him, whoever he was, had a Hebrew book with points lying near him, and

that the harp was a very large one, of the ancient Welsh construction.

The acquisitions thus made were not only obtained under almost every kind of disadvantage, but in the most direct opposition to circumstances which must have deterred any one from the pursuit, who had not been actuated by a resolution that nothing could shake. The time devoted to this purpose should have been employed in sawing timber, working in the fields, fishing, and other labours; but his inaptitude for these occupations, and his attachment to the study of languages, brought down upon him, as might be expected, the anger of his father, who, not content with remonstrances, had frequently recourse to blows, whenever he found him pursuing his studies when he ought to have been at work. In these severities, his father was joined by his elder brother; from both of whom he experienced such a rigorous treatment, as nothing but the distressed situation and necessities of the family, and their total ignorance of the subjects to which he was devoted, could possibly excuse.

About the year 1804, his father made a voyage in a small vessel from Aberdaron to Liverpool, when he brought Richard as his assistant. On his arrival

there, one of his first objects was to find a book-seller's shop, where his singular appearance attracted the notice of some persons, who inquired into his situation, and finding he had some knowledge of languages, gave him a little pecuniary assistance, and afterwards furnished him with a few books, amongst which were the *Αναλεκτα Ἱστορικά*, the *Horologium Hebræum of Schurhardius*, *Virgilio Opera*, and the poem of *The Grave*, by Blair; a minute of which presents he has carefully preserved. Richard did not, however, long enjoy the fruits of his good fortune. On his return home, the vessel was driven ashore at Llanhairn, on the coast of Carnarvon, and filled with water, in consequence of which almost all his books were either lost or spoiled.

On his arrival at home, a still greater misfortune attended him. As his thirst for learning increased, the severity with which he was treated by his father increased also; and when threats and imprecations had no effect, recourse was had to harsher measures; till at length some strokes across his shoulders with an iron poker served him as notice to quit the house. He, therefore, collected the remains of his little library, consisting of some old books which had been given to him, or which

he had purchased with the small presents occasionally made him in money, and quitting the house of his father, took the road to Carnarvon, without being possessed of a single penny to provide for himself on the journey. Under these circumstances, he was obliged to dispose of part of his books; and as his burden grew lighter as his journey lengthened, he arrived in safety at the place of his destination.

After disposing, at Carnarvon, of a further portion of his books, reserving some fragments of a *Latin and Greek*, and a *Welsh and Latin* dictionary, which, as he himself stated, he was unwilling to part with under the greatest adversity, he proceeded from Carnarvon to Bangor, where he had the good fortune to attract the notice of Dr. William Cleaver, then bishop of that see; who, perceiving that his acquirements in languages were very uncommon for a person in his situation, provided him with decent clothing, and encouraged him in his pursuits, by presenting to him some valuable books, amongst which were an edition of Robert Stephens's *Greek Testament*, and Schrevelius's *Greek Lexicon*. The Bishop also humanely took him into his service, and employed him in working in his gardens and fields. Whether Richard

thought that the labour in which he was employed interfered too much with his studies, or whether some other cause of dissatisfaction arose between him and the Bishop, does not appear; but after having remained with him about two months, he availed himself of an invitation from the Rev. John Williams, to come and reside with him at his house at Treffos, in the Isle of Anglesey. On a visit made by the Bishop to Treffos, he found Richard there, and gave him notice not to return to Bangor, as he had no occasion for his further services.

The appearance of the Bishop at Treffos seems also to have had an unfavourable effect on the fortunes of Richard at that place, which he suddenly quitted, after having resided with Mr. Williams about half a year, which time was principally devoted to the study of Greek.

Although Richard has assigned as a reason for quitting the hospitable abode of Mr. Williams, the ill usage received from the servants, yet the actual cause seems to be enveloped in no little degree of mystery. If, however, the following account of a dream which Richard had at that place, and which he has related in his own hand-writing, as connected with this subject, can throw any light upon it, it is at the reader's service: "I dreamed," says

he, “ at Treffos : and I saw in my dream the head of Herod brought into the parlour, and the hair thereof bearing three colours mixed, viz. black, red, and the colour of brimstone burning ; and I heard that the death of Herod was sadly lamented ; wherefore his head was received with great veneration and honour. And I heard that Herod was beheaded in the battle against the Γαλαται Αλλο-
 ῥογες, when fighting against them at the head of one of the Roman armies : *consequently my welfare was changed at Treffos!*”

During his residence at Anglesey, Richard had the good fortune to meet with some French refugees, who supplied him with a grammar of that language ; by the aid of which, and by their assistance, he acquired such a knowledge of it, as not only to read it, but to speak it with a good accent. He has since acquired an equal knowledge of Italian ; and in either of these languages converses with great ease and fluency ; and it is remarkable, that he never changes the language in which the conversation is begun, as long as any other person is inclined to continue it.

On leaving Treffos, Richard made his way once more to Liverpool ; where, as he says, he was “ entertained with great kindness” by the persons

who had assisted him on his former visit. His person and dress at this time were extremely singular: to an immense shock of black hair he united a bushy beard of the same colour. His clothing consisted of several coarse and ragged vestments, the spaces between which were filled with books, surrounding him in successive layers, so that he was literally a walking library. These books all occupied their proper stations, being placed higher or lower, according as their sizes suited the conformation of his body; so that he was acquainted with the situation of each, and could bring it out, when wanted, without difficulty. When introduced into a room, he had not the least idea of any thing that surrounded him; and when he took his departure, he appeared to have forgotten the entrance. Absorbed in his studies, he had continually a book in his hand, to which he frequently referred, as if to communicate or receive information, and apparently under a conviction, that every person he met with was as much interested in such studies as himself.—His sight was imperfect, his voice sharp and dissonant; and, upon the whole, his appearance and manners grotesque in the highest degree; yet, under all these disadvantages, there was a gleam in

his countenance which marked intelligence, and an unaffected simplicity in his behaviour which conciliated regard.

Soon after his arrival at Liverpool, an attempt was made by some of his friends to obtain for him a suitable employment; but before that could be expected, it was necessary that he should be rendered more decent in his person, and provided with better clothes. Being then asked to what employment he had been brought up, he answered, to that of a *sawyer*. A recommendation was, therefore, given him to a person who employed many hands in sawing; and Richard was put down in the saw-pit. He accordingly commenced his labours, and proceeded for some time with a fair prospect of success. It was not long, however, before his efforts relaxed, and grew fainter and fainter; till at length he fell on his face, and lay extended at the bottom of the pit, calling out loudly for help. On raising him up, and inquiring into the cause of his disaster, it appeared, that he had laboured to the full extent of his arms' length, when, not being aware that it was necessary he should also move forwards his feet, and being quite breathless and exhausted, he was found in the situation described. As soon as he had recovered himself,

he returned to the person who sent him, and complained loudly of the treatment he had received, and of his being put down under-ground. On being asked, why he had represented himself as *a sawyer*? he replied, that he had never been employed in any other kind of sawing than *cross-cutting* the branches of timber trees when fallen in the woods in Wales.

As there appeared little prospect of instructing Richard in any useful occupation, he was left to pursue his studies, and was placed in a situation where he had an opportunity of making every proficiency of which the nature of his talents would admit. The person with whom he resided undertook to attend to his conduct, and in particular to accustom him to habits of cleanliness; a duty which, as far as in her power, she strictly performed. He had not, however, continued here more than half a year, when he became restless and tired of his situation; and having frequently expressed a wish to return to his own country, he was furnished with a small sum of money, and again took his departure from Liverpool, carrying with him several books which had been given to him, amongst which were the *Thesaurus Linguae Sanctæ* of Sanctes Pagninus, the *Grammatica Ara-*

bica of Erpenius, Bythner's Lyra Prophetica, and other grammatical works. Thus provided, he proceeded again to the house of his father, who "was not so *fierce* against him," to use his own expression, "during the time that he received pay for his support, as when he studied with him *empty-handed*." As his little stock of cash was soon expended, Richard was obliged once more to assist in sawing timber for building fishing-boats, to which use, as he states, "his father afterwards neglected to apply it, and improvidently left the timber to rot."

It was not long before fresh dissensions arose between Richard and his father, on account of his attachment to the study of languages, and the barbarous treatment which he had before experienced was renewed. He, therefore, again left his father's house, and for some time obtained a shelter with the Rev. Benjamin Jones, a dissenting minister at Pwllheli. Thence he proceeded again to Liverpool, where, as he says, "his ambition brought upon him many troubles and offences, almost inextricable and innumerable; and where he was induced to part with a *Hebrew Bible with points, and Masoretic various readings*; a sacrifice which he so deeply regretted (although, as he acknowledges,

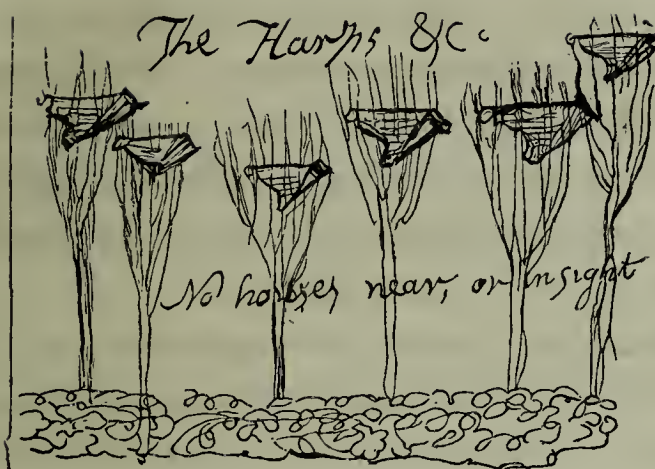
it was printed with such pale ink, on such bad paper, with so small a type, and with pages so close to the bottom, as to render it scarcely legible,) that he determined to undertake a journey to London, for the purpose of buying another Hebrew Bible; and at the same time of obtaining some instruction in the Chaldee and Syriac tongues; a resolution which he lost no time in carrying into effect.

In the summer of 1807, Richard accordingly set out from Liverpool, furnished with a small packet on his back, a long pole in his hand, round which was rolled a map of the roads, and his few remaining books deposited in the various foldings of his dress. This journey did not, however, answer the purposes intended; and what was still worse, he could neither find any employment, nor obtain assistance “by any means whatever.”

From London, Richard made his way to Dover, probably not without some intention of obtaining a passage to the continent. But here his ill fortune seems to have changed, and he was engaged in sifting ashes in the king’s dock-yard, under the direction of the superintendent, who benevolently allowed him his breakfast in a morning, and furnished him with a chest to keep his books, and

also paid him two shillings and fourpence per day as wages. From this income, Richard was not only enabled to provide for his personal wants, but also to pay the Rabbi Nathan, a celebrated proficient in Hebrew, for instruction in that language, and for the books requisite for the purpose. In this situation he continued for nearly three years, which seem to have been passed more happily than any other period of his life ; nor can it be denied, that the circumstance of a person in his forlorn and destitute situation, labouring for his daily subsistence, and applying a part of his humble earnings to acquire a knowledge of the ancient languages, forms as singular an object as the annals of literature can produce.

During his stay at Dover, Richard had another dream, the particulars of which he has also preserved in his own hand-writing, illustrated by a drawing: “ Before my continual disappointments and troubles in learning, I dreamed, and saw myself in my dream upon the plain near the river of Babylon, where I saw the harps of the captives of Israel hung upon the willows ; and I saw the willows grown to an exceeding great height, and the harps were hung upon them in the night when being rainy weather.”



In 1810, Richard returned from Dover to London, where he obtained an introduction to the Society for promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, who appear to have paid some attention to him; but if we may rely upon his representations, their kindness to him was not of long continuance, but was soon converted into hostility and oppression; insomuch, that he complains, that he was reduced to the utmost distress, and compelled to sell his books, to prevent his being starved to death. It must, however, be understood, that Richard is very liable to misinterpret the intentions and conduct of his friends, especially when any restraint is attempted to be imposed upon him, and that he is by no means sparing in his complaints on such occasions.

In this emergency, and having no other re-

source left, he fortunately recollected the association of his countrymen, formed in London, under the name of the *Welsh Bardic Society*, to whom he found an opportunity of explaining his situation, and who furnished him with the means of returning to his native country.

He arrived in safety in a small shallop at Barmouth, whence he made his way once more to Bangor, where his singular acquirements in Hebrew attracted the notice of the Rev. Richard Davies of that place, who received him under his protection, and supported him for six months; during which time he “copied for his patron all the Hebrew words in Littleton’s Latin Dictionary, and corrected some of the *errata* in them, according to the Hebrew Lexicon of *Sanctes Pagninus*, abridged by *Raphelengius*.”

On leaving Bangor, he was enabled, by the kindness of Mr Davies and of the Rev. Samuel Rice, to pay another visit to Liverpool, where he applied to his former friends, by whom it was thought, that as he could read and write with considerable accuracy, he might be enabled to make some proficiency in the business of a printer. He was, therefore, placed in the office of a printer in Liverpool, who undertook to give him instruc-

tions ; but, after a few weeks' trial, it appeared that the inaptitude of his hands for any correct and continued labour, rendered it impossible for him to make any progress in that profession. This, however, is not perhaps the sole cause of his disappointment ; the fact being, that all his thoughts and views are so turned towards the acquisition of languages, that he is never at rest when prevented from the pursuit ; and that, to place him in any situation where he cannot follow his inclinations, is to render him as miserable as an animal when taken out of the element in which it was intended by nature that it should live.

His misfortunes now seem to have rapidly accumulated ; and he complains, that at an Irish lodging-house, where he had taken up his abode, he was robbed of *P. Martin's Chaldee Grammar*, and several other books, and that the remainder were thrown through the window into the street. To this he adds, that one of his principal friends had gone to London, and *consequently* the Hebrew words which he had copied from Littleton's Latin Dictionary, were stolen from him by a thief in Liverpool. He had still retained a compendious copy of the *Hebrew Bible*, and *Erpenius's Arabic Grammar* ; but these he was under the necessity

of pawning for a few shillings, with which he proceeded to Carnarvon; where he was obliged to sell *Schrevelius's Greek Lexicon* for his support. This last sacrifice seems nearly to have exhausted his patience; and he complains, with great bitterness, that *he has been refused employment to earn his bread, although suffering the rigours of famine and nakedness; and all on account of his endeavours to study Greek, Hebrew, &c.*

From this period to the present time, the circumstances of this individual seem to have admitted of little variation. He had, however, the good fortune to find a refuge for two or three years at Bagillt, in the county of Flint, where he was supplied with the necessaries of life, and had an opportunity of pursuing his favourite studies without interruption. These were diversified only by some eccentricities, which demonstrate, that he was not utterly incapable of other acquirements. In particular, he was highly delighted with blowing a ram's horn, which he did in such a manner as might have entitled him to rank with those who, in elder times, overthrew the walls of Jericho, and rendered him no inconsiderable nuisance to the neighbourhood. Having had a present made to him of a handsome French horn, he threw aside

his former instrument, and by constant assiduity, qualified himself to play a few tunes in a manner more remarkable for its noise than its accuracy. Thus accomplished, he paid a visit to Chester during the election of 1818; and arriving there at the precise time when the band of General Grosvenor were celebrating his return, he placed himself in the midst of them—

“ ————— and blew a blast so loud and dread,
Were ne’er prophetic sounds so full of woe.”

The derangement thus occasioned induced the General to call him up to him, when, after a few words, he made him a handsome present, and gave him his permission to blow his horn as long as he pleased.

Another of his peculiarities is a partiality for the whole race of cats, which he seems to regard with great affection, and to resent any injury done to them with the utmost indignation. This singular predilection has led him to adorn the numerous books on grammar, which he has himself written, with prints of cats cut from old ballads, or wherever else he can discover them, and to copy every thing that has been written and strikes his fancy respecting them; amongst which is *The Auction of Cats*, in Cateaton-street, the well-known production of

one of the most celebrated wits of the present day.

From the time of his quitting Bagillt, the usual residence of Richard has been in Liverpool, where he may be seen at times walking with a book under his arm, without noticing or speaking to any one unless he be first spoken to, when he answers in any language in which he is addressed with great readiness and civility. If any gratuity be offered to him (for he never solicits it), he receives it with a degree of hesitation, generally using the words, "I am not worthy." To any ridicule to which his dress and appearance may give rise, he is totally insensible. At one time he chose to tie up his hair with a large piece of green ferret, which gave him the most ludicrous appearance possible. Some time since, one of his friends gave him a light-horseman's jacket, of blue and silver, which he immediately put on, and continued to wear, and which, contrasted with his hair and beard, gave him the appearance of a Jewish warrior, as represented in old prints, and consequently attracted after him a crowd of children. In his present appearance, he strongly resembles some of the Beggars of Rembrandt; and if he had lived in the time of that great artist, might have afforded a good

subject for his immortal pencil; yet there is some expression of dignity in his countenance, which is well marked in the excellent portrait of him, given as a frontispiece, and which cannot be observed without a feeling of respect.

In his diet he is particularly frugal, or rather careless, providing for himself at very small expense, and drinking only water, or sometimes milk if it falls in his way; nor was he ever seen in a state of intoxication. He is generally the master of a few shillings, which he husbands with infinite caution, taking care lest they should be totally expended, even if he should be compelled to sell some of his books for his immediate support.

His religious opinions are not easy to ascertain, as he declines answering any questions, and generally walks away when such inquiries are made; but that he entertains a deep reverence for the Supreme Being, sufficiently appears from the Hebrew passages which he is in the habit of repeating extempore from the scriptures, and by the frequent extracts in Hebrew, Greek, and other languages, in his books and memoranda. For some time he associated much with the Jews, and attended their synagogues, with a view of improving himself in Hebrew; but having given some offence, a quarrel

took place between them, which he heightened with some sarcastic remarks on their ceremonies, that terminated their further acquaintance. His disposition is mild, and his general manner civil and respectful. He is remarkable for his adherence to truth on all occasions, nor is he addicted to any manner of vice. He exhibits also a degree of liberality in his character, as he frequently gives, or offers to give, books, which he values very highly, either in return for any kindness shewn him, or as a mark of his esteem and good-will. Even the works which he has compiled with great labour, he feels no hesitation in parting with; and when they are again shewn to him, regards them with the utmost indifference. In this respect, he has truly described his own character in one of those scraps in which he frequently commits his thoughts to writing.—“ If any kindness or favour should be done to me by any person or persons, a friend or friends, &c., my will and natural inclination of my heart is to return the same also to them in virtue and good works, not by evil; and if I should be employed in any laborious work, I would endeavour to do such a work according to the best of my abilities.”

Although it cannot be denied, that Richard

Roberts has made a considerable proficiency in the knowledge of languages, and has read many of the principal authors, as well ancient as modern, yet, from various causes, it is no easy matter to ascertain the real extent of his acquirements. There is, indeed, reason to believe, that, in his eager pursuit of other objects, he has, in a great degree, neglected or discarded his native tongue. The English is to him a foreign language, and was not acquired by him without considerable difficulty, as he did not commence the study of it very early in life. It is not extraordinary, therefore, that he should write it imperfectly, or that we should regard his attempts pretty much in the same light, as an ancient would perhaps have regarded the Greek and Latin attempts of modern times, or as a native of one country usually regards any composition in his own language by the native of another.

There is also great reason to believe, as has before been observed, that in the perusal of the numerous works that have engaged his attention, his chief pleasure is not derived from the facts, or the information they contain, but from the mere investigation of the words, and the grammatical construction of the language; insomuch, that al-

though he may have perused a work with the greatest deliberation and correctness, he seems to be nearly as ignorant of its contents, unless they relate to subjects connected with language, as he was before he began ; of which the following incident may, perhaps, serve as a sufficient instance.

A distinguished member of the University of Oxford happening to call on one of Richard's friends, at a time when Richard himself happened to be near at hand, it occurred to his friend, that the literary curiosity of the learned visitor might be gratified by a short interview with a character of such a description. Richard was accordingly introduced ; and, after the first surprise occasioned by his appearance had subsided, and some explanations had been given as to the nature of his acquirements, he was asked several questions, both in the French and Italian languages, to which he replied with that readiness and simplicity for which he is remarkable. He was then asked, whether he understood Latin and Greek ; and having answered in the affirmative, was desired to read a passage in Homer. Richard accordingly thrust his hand into his bosom, and diving down to the residence of the great poet, dragged him from

his depths, and offered him to the visitor to select a passage, who, declining a more intimate acquaintance, desired Richard would open the book, and read such passage as might first occur to him. He accordingly began with some lines in the *Iliad* with great deliberation and accuracy, commenting on them as he proceeded, with many judicious critical remarks, which shewed a thorough knowledge of the language, and surprised the gentleman to whom they were addressed. Being then requested to translate what he had read, he gave it in such English as he usually employs; slowly and cautiously, but with sufficient accuracy to shew that, as far as grammatical construction went, he perfectly understood the sense. The following dialogue then took place:

Q. Very well, Richard; you have translated this passage very well. Pray have you read the *Iliad*?

A. Yes, I have.

Q. And what do you think of the character of Andromache?

A. (After a pause) Andro—mache?

Q. Yes. What do you think of the character of Andromache?

A. (After another pause) It is a *fight of men*.*

Q. Yes, yes; that is certainly the derivation of the name: but what do you think of Andromache, the wife of Hector?

A. I know nothing about that!

Certainly, said the visitor, this is one of the most extraordinary circumstances I ever met with. Although perfectly acquainted with the language, this man appears not to have had the least idea of the subject on which he has been reading.

After the gentleman had taken his departure, Richard was asked, how it happened that he could have been so stupid as not to give a more rational answer? to which he very unconcernedly replied, "I thought he was asking me about the *word*, and not about the *woman*."

On another occasion, when the conversation turned merely on the nature of languages, and the best mode of acquiring them, he exhibited himself to much greater advantage, and gave a proof, not only of the extent of his acquirements, but of the promptitude with which he could apply them to use.

* Ἀνδρῶν μάχη.

One of his friends happened to have a party to dinner, several of whom were persons of considerable literary distinction; when, by the misunderstanding of a message after dinner, the door opened, and to the equal surprise of both the host and his guests, Richard entered the room, his whole dress and appearance being grotesque in the highest degree. The curiosity of the company was excited, and after the mistake to which his introduction was owing had been explained, he was asked several questions in French, to which he gave ready and correct answers. The conversation was then changed to Italian, in which he acquitted himself with equal readiness. To this succeeded an inquiry into his knowledge of Latin and Greek, in which languages he read and translated some passages to the satisfaction of the persons present. One of the party then proceeded to examine him more particularly, when the following dialogue occurred :

Q. As you seem to have made no little proficiency in languages, pray tell me what method you take in acquiring a language ?

A. It is according to what the nature of the language is.

Q. How would you set about acquiring a modern language?

A. If it was the Spanish, for instance, I would take a vocabulary of the language, and examine what words corresponded with or resembled the words in any other language, with which I was acquainted; as, for instance, the Latin, French, or Italian; and those words I would strike out of the vocabulary, leaving only such as were the original or peculiar words of the Spanish tongue; and then, by the assistance of a grammar, I should soon be able to attain a knowledge of that language.

All the party admitted, that this was a most judicious and excellent method, and Richard withdrew, with expressions of approbation from all present.

The disposition of Richard Roberts towards the acquirement of languages is accompanied by an equal disposition to communicate the knowledge of them to others; and he considers it as a duty incumbent on him to offer his services wherever he thinks them likely to be acceptable. The disappointments which he continually meets with on this head, and the indifference shewn to such pur-

suits, are the constant subjects of his lamentation ; and he sometimes complains that he is held in contempt and persecuted, for his exertions in the cause of learning and of truth. “ I do not expect,” says he, in a few lines received from him, “ to be much favoured nor assisted at Carnarvon in my attempt to teach Greek and Hebrew ; for I am already convinced, that I am there so much despised and hated on that account, as to be considered not deserving any encouragement.” At other times Richard seems to consider himself as not unlikely to be in some danger of persecution on account of his religious opinions. “ I rejoice,” says he, “ that I am counted worthy to suffer in that just cause for which I am willing to lay down my life, if my body should be exposed to be burned, or being condemned to the most cruel torments.” These passages, which display at the same moment the strength of his resolution and the weakness of his intellect, are scarcely reconcileable with the ability and acuteness which he exhibits in the study and acquisition of languages ; but this point will be more particularly adverted to in the ensuing pages.

That Richard should not, in the present times, find many persons disposed to undertake the study

of the Greek and Hebrew languages, will not be thought extraordinary; but it must, at the same time, be confessed, that a person must not only be desirous of, but in the highest degree eager for such attainments, before he would consent to receive them through the medium by which they are offered to him. His ignorance of the customs and manners of society, the unfortunate weakness of his sight, and the difficulty of elucidating his meaning from collateral subjects, form no inconsiderable obstacles to his qualifications as a teacher; and when to these we add his total neglect of cleanliness in his person and dress, we stand in need of no further explanation, and cannot but acknowledge, that the case is hopeless; that if Greek and Hebrew are to be acquired, it must be through a purer channel; and that, if the unfortunate subject of these remarks is to exist on earth, it must be by the disinterested bounty of well-disposed individuals, and not by the aid of any support which he is likely to obtain for himself.

The disappointments which Richard has experienced in his endeavours to promote the study of languages, have not, however, deterred him from doing whatever remained in his power for that purpose, as appears from several works of surprising

labour, to the completion of which he has devoted himself with unremitting attention. Amongst these is a compendious Greek and English Lexicon, which, with some corrections, might be a useful work. Another of his volumes is a Collection of Hebrew Extracts, which is followed by a Vocabulary in Hebrew and English, to which he has added a brief Latin treatise on the music and accents of the Hebrew tongue. A much more laborious undertaking is a lexicon in Hebrew, Greek and English, in which he has made considerable progress. This work, which, as appears from a minute in his hand-writing, was undertaken at the instance of the Rev. Richard Davies of Bangor, was intended to have included also the Latin and Welsh; but the want of books requisite for the purpose has hitherto prevented his accomplishing such object. It is, however, not improbable, that the portion already finished might be of use to any person engaged in a similar work.

In the course of his unremitting researches after Hebrew books, Richard happened to meet with a work in two parts, intitled, “*The Hebrew Reader; or a practical Introduction to the Reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, &c.*” Lond. 1808. On examining this work, Richard conceived that it was not,

in all respects, well calculated for the purpose for which it was intended; and particularly because it gave no directions as to the design and use of Hebrew points, which, in his opinion, are essential not only to the musical intonation or pronunciation, but to the accurate understanding of that tongue. In order to remedy this defect, he compiled another grammar under the same title, except that he professes to teach the Hebrew with points; a circumstance which renders his work essentially different from the other, as it commences with instructions for writing and using such points, and employs them throughout the whole of the extracts and lessons. In this work, he has not, however, entered into any discussion on this contested subject; but, from a smaller grammar of his, designed for the use of an individual, it appears, that he was well aware that the points had by some been considered as the invention of a more recent period; on which account he commences his work with some Hebrew extracts from different authors, tending to prove their antiquity, and which he thus translates: "The letters are compared to a body, and the vowel points to a soul; for the points move the letters in the same manner as the soul moveth the body.

R. Neconia ben Hakkana, who flourished thirty years before the birth of Christ." And again, "There is no power in any of the letters to decline this side or that side, without the points. All the letters are like the body without the soul; but when the points come, the body is constituted in its station. *R. Simeon ben Jochai, who flourished many years before the beginning of the Talmud.*" His own explanation, as given in conversation, was, that the Hebrew without vowels is like a harp without strings; to which he added, that the very name of *vowel* (*vox*) proves that it gives the voice, and that the *consonants* (*consonans*) are only the accompaniment.

A short time ago, one of his friends gave him the frame of an old broken Welsh harp, which he repaired with greater ingenuity than might have been expected, and supplied it with strings. This he occasionally carries with him, and accompanies his repetition of some of the Psalms in the original, in a manner not altogether displeasing.

To account, in any satisfactory manner, for the propensity so strongly evinced in this individual for the study of languages, and for the proficiency which he has made in them, whilst he appears to be so deficient in other respects, is a matter of considerable difficulty, which must be left to the decision of those who are competent to discuss the subject, and to whom the facts before related; may not be wholly useless. We may, however, perhaps be allowed to take it for granted, that whether the subject of our inquiry has derived from nature a genius particularly turned to such studies, or whether this propensity was derived from early impressions on the mind, arising from circumstances by which he was surrounded, he possesses a considerable degree of intellectual ability; for how otherwise are we to account for the acquisitions he has made in so many different languages, including a knowledge of the different construction and genius of each, and of some of the most abstruse inquiries that can occupy the human mind? That this ability has been directed to a particular channel is evident; and as, from the imperfection of our nature, the greater degree of attention we

devote to any one subject, the less shall we be enabled to pay to another, it seems possible, that we may carry our predilection to such an extent as almost to exclude every other object. It is on these grounds, that we are to account for the well-known fact, that men of the greatest genius and ability frequently make mistakes, from which the generality of mankind are exempt; the degree of application to some particular subject having wholly absorbed the mind, and rendered it inattentive to the common occurrences of life.

May we not then suppose, that the extreme degree of attention employed by the object of our present inquiry on one particular subject formed itself into a habit; that every thing which interfered with this pursuit was neglected or despised, till the other faculties of the mind became obscured and useless from the mere want of cultivation and exertion. "The tendency of literary habits in general," says a distinguished writer, whose opinions on this subject are of the highest authority,* "and more particularly of philosophical pursuits to exercise the thoughts about words, can scarcely fail

* Mr. Dugald Stewart.

to have some effect in weakening the powers of recollection and conception with respect to sensible objects." The same author further observes, "that a man of genius, in consequence of a peculiarly strong attachment to a particular subject, may first feel a want of inclination, and may afterwards acquire a want of capacity of attending to common occurrences." This he has exemplified in the case of Montaigne, who has himself recorded some striking instances of his own ignorance. But if such was the case with Montaigne, who never appears to have been so much under the influence of a master passion as to induce him wholly to relinquish other branches of study, can it be thought extraordinary, that a person whose faculties are daily and hourly devoted solely to the acquisition of languages and the knowledge of words, should be ignorant of the affairs of the world, and negligent of his own person? The only difference between him and Montaigne is, that the former has allowed his predominating passion to carry him to a greater extent.

In the circumstances of his early life, Richard seems nearly to have resembled the celebrated Moses Mendelsohn, who is considered as having led the way, in the last century, to the improve-

ment of the German tongue. Mendelsohn was the son of a schoolmaster, whose poverty was so extreme, that Mendelsohn, at the age of fourteen, was obliged to quit his paternal roof, and passed several years in indigence and obscurity, frequently in want of the necessaries of life. During this period, he however found opportunities of pursuing his studies; and, by the kindness of several learned men, who supplied him with books, and gave him instructions, not only acquired a knowledge of the ancient languages, but was initiated in the mysteries of the theology, the jurisprudence, and scholastic philosophy of the Jews. But although the circumstances attending the early lives of Mendelsohn and of Richard Roberts equally afford a proof of a strong predilection for literature, yet Mendelsohn was more fortunate in the power of applying his acquisitions to use, and became one of the first writers of his time: whereas the attempts of Richard at composition in any language are always defective and incorrect; so that, although he understands them to a certain extent, there is no one that he can properly call his own.

But the person whom Richard seems to resemble the most in the character of his mind, and the earnestness of his pursuits, is Magliabechi, the learned

librarian of the Grand Duke's library at Florence; who, to an astonishing memory, an unquenchable thirst of learning, and an extensive acquaintance with ancient and modern languages, united an aspect the most forbidding, aggravated by a total neglect of his person, amounting to squalid filthiness. Such, however, were his acquirements, that he was celebrated throughout all Europe. His memory was so extraordinary, that he was enabled not only to call to mind whatever he had read, but to recollect the author, and the work whence he obtained it, and to refer to the page where it was to be found; yet, notwithstanding his great learning, nothing remains of his labours, except some of his letters, and a short catalogue of oriental manuscripts, in the Florentine Library. But if Magliabechi and the humble subject of our present inquiry resemble each other in their disposition and acquirements, they are greatly dissimilar in their fortunes; and whilst Magliabechi was the correspondent of the learned, and the associate of nobles, Richard is under the necessity of carrying his literary treasures about his person, and of accepting from the hand of benevolence the slender support which his moderate desires and temperate habits require.

After all, it is not improbable, that this predilection of the mind to a particular object, as exemplified in Richard Roberts, is not of such rare occurrence as it may at first appear, although it has seldom been carried to the extent exhibited in the present instance. It may, indeed, safely be presumed, that there are few persons who have not, either from disposition or circumstances, been induced to pursue, and make a proficiency in, some one subject, not only to the neglect, but to the total exclusion of many others of equal or greater importance; and that the singularities observable in the character and conduct of Richard Roberts, his neglect of his person, and his ignorance of the most ordinary concerns of life, are not in fact, more extraordinary than that those persons who are engaged in the busy scenes of life, should be utterly ignorant of those languages which have been the constant objects of his study. His example may, however, serve to shew, that an attachment to any particular pursuit may, if it exceed the bounds of reason and judgment, be carried to such an extreme, as even to defeat its own purpose; that a proficiency in one subject only, and particularly if that subject be confined to a knowledge of words, can be of no practical use; and that the powers of the

mind can only be exerted to advantage by a proper arrangement of the objects of its inquiry, and by an union of pursuits. “The pre-eminence amongst men which procures personal respect, and which terminates in lasting reputation, is seldom or never obtained by the exercise of a single faculty of mind. Experience teaches us, that it has been acquired by those only who have possessed the comprehension and the energy of general talents; and who have regulated their application in the line which chance or perhaps accident, may have determined by the dictates of their judgment.” (*Dr. Currie’s Life of Burns.*)

HEBREW ELEGY
ON THE
LAMENTED
DEATH OF THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE.
BY DAVID MELDOLA.

1 אוי ! בת בְּרִישָׁאנָא מִסְכָּד הַגִּדְלִי
אָבֵל עָלִי אִשָּׁה שָׁרָה וּגְבֵרֶת
אִשֶּׁת נְעוּרִים הָהּ ! יָפוּיָהּ נְעֻדָּת
קוֹל יִלְלָת עַל-שׂוֹד שָׁבֵר הִילִילִי :

2 הוּא ! צַעֲקִי בְּבָכִי עַל הַמְּנֻרֶת
כִּי נִדְּלָה שְׁבָרָךְ וּמִכְאוּבֶיךָ
מַעֲצָבֶת רוּחְךָ וַיְגוֹנוּתֶיךָ
תִּצָּל וְתִבְהַל אֲזֵן שְׁמַעַת :

3 שְׁאֲרֵלוֹשׁ כְּנָפֵן פְּרִיָה הַפְּרִית
אֲזִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲשָׁכּוֹל עֲנָף וְחֶרֶשׁ
מִטֵּעַ לְהִתְפָּאֵר נָצַר מִשְׁרֵשׁ
גַּם עָלְתָה נָצָה בְּפָרִי מַצְמִית :

4 עַד אֲשַׁכְּלִתֶּיהָ טָרָם יִבְשְׁלוּ
עוֹדָה בְּאֶבֶה הִיא עוֹלָה וְקָמָה
נָפֵן לְשָׁמָּה הָהּ ! פֶּתַע הוֹשָׁמָה
פָּרִי וְגַם עֲנָף יַחַד אִמְלָלוּ :

5 תִּכְוֹן תִּפְלְתִי לְגִסְיִי אֶרֶץ •
 יִתְנַשְּׂאוּ תָמִיד בְּטוֹב יִשְׁכְּנוּ •
 תָּרוּם בְּהוֹד מְרָגֵם לְעַד יִפְּנוּ •
 יִחְיוּ שְׁנוֹת חַיִּים אִין בְּהֶם פֶּרֶץ :

6 אֲנִי אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם הָעִשָּׂה כֹּלָא •
 שׁוֹבָה רָפָא שְׁבָרָם גַּם יִתְעַנְּנוּ •
 נַחֵם אֲבִלוֹתָם עוֹד לֹא יִדְּאֶנּוּ •
 מִיָּדָה : יִדְּעֶנּוּ כִּי כָל-אֱלֹהִים :
 דְּבָרֵי הַמְּקוֹנֵן דוֹד בֶּן ל"א א כמ"והר"ר רפאל
 מילדולה ס"ט :

TRANSLATED

BY

RICHARD ROBERTS JONES.

Woe, daughter! Britannia, increase mourning!
Weeping for a woman, a princess, and a mistress!
A woman of youth: Ah! her beauty is failed!
A voice of howling, upon a wall of breach, howl thou;

Alas! cry in weeping for the chastisement;
For thy breach and thy sorrows are increased:
From the affliction of thy spirit and thy groans
The ear that heareth shall grieve sore and trouble.

CHARLOTTE flourished as a fruitful vine;
Then to make a branch and a bough,
A plant to glorify itself, a graff from a root
Also; her virtue ascended in a fruit flourishing;

Till her grapes before they became ripe were plucked;
While she in her greenness, she growing and standing,
 (became)
A vine to desolation; ah! suddenly made desolate.
Fruit and also branch are cut off together.

My prayer shall prepare to the princes of earth ;
Let them erect themselves always : they shall dwell in good.
Thou shalt raise up in comeliness their horns, for ever they
shall be established.
Let there be years of life, let there be no breach in them.

I beseech thee, eternal Lord, who makest wonders, return,
heal their breach :
Comfort their mourning still, let them not be caused to
fear.

Jan. 30th, 1820.

IMITATED BY ANOTHER HAND.

Bow, daughter, bow, Britain, in sorrow thine head,
For a Princess, a Wife, and a Mother lies dead ;
Cut off in her prime,—in her beauty she falls,
And the wail of the mourner is heard on thy walls.

O weep ! as thy chastisement wider extends,
Thy moanings increase, and thy sorrow ascends ;
The groans of thy spirit no balm can relieve,
And the ear that shall hear thee in anguish shall grieve.

Elate was the vine in its youth as it grew ;
And strong was the stem and expanded the bough ;
Encompass'd with glory, deriv'd from its root,
It blossom'd in honour, and virtue its fruit.

But ere the crude grape could its colours display,
The clusters were torn from the desolate spray.
O bright was the hope, but unfounded the trust,
And the fruit and the branches lie low in the dust.

Yet shall not the hope and the prayer be in vain,
That the root may survive, and a scion remain !
That the breach may be heal'd, which the nations deplore,
And the prince and the people may sorrow no more !

For great are the wonders our God can perform ;
He can walk on the whirlwind, and silence the storm :
O then may his goodness, his mercy appear,
And establish his servants in righteousness here !

THE END.





